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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000280

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SO](#) [KE](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: 4,200 SOMALI REFUGEES IN MASSAWA

REF: ASMARA 269

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: UNHCR Senior Protection Officer Zipporah Msagah met with PolOff to discuss the Somali refugee camp in Massawa. The camp currently hosts 4,800 registered refugees. Of this group, more than 600 refugees are suspected to be simply registering and moving through the camp to opportunities in Italy via Libya. While many of the refugees come from central and south Somalia, UNHCR is seeing an increase in the numbers from Somaliland and Puntland. According to Zipporah, the camp is entirely run by the Eritrean government's (GSE's) Office of Refugee Affairs (ORA). The ORA administers the food rations, manages the hospital and the schools, and conducts overall quality assurance assessments in the camp. Although Zipporah seemed pleased with ORA's work, she lamented the GSE's distaste for UNHCR in general, mentioning the GSE's attempts to reduce overall expatriate staff. End Summary.

NUMBERS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

12. (C) Approximately 4,800 Somalis reside in the UNHCR refugee camp in Massawa. Many of these are protracted refugees who have lived in the camp for more than 10 years. Some were born in the camp (UNHCR reported 110 registered newborns between November 2008 and August 2009). The numbers are somewhat deceiving; UNHCR reports that although 4,800 are registered, recipients for food rations only number 4,200. On its latest assessment in August, UNHCR counted 119 new arrivals registered since the beginning of the year. However, only 25 showed up during the August assessment. Zipporah believes that many of these no-shows (600 in total) are simply registering in the camp and are proceeding on to Europe for better opportunities. She suspects the exit route involves moving through Sudan and then Libya.

13. (C) Most of the refugees come from central and south Somalia, according to UNHCR. The camp is also seeing an increase in new arrivals from minority clans in Somaliland and Puntland. The refugees receive different resettlement priority, based on their origins. For instance, members of the Harti clan are considered for resettlement only if they originate from Somaliland. Those from Puntland or the districts of Galkayo, Galdogob, and Jariban are only considered for repatriation. Members of the Majarteen clan are also not considered for resettlement if originating from Puntland or the Mudug region. Across the board, UNHCR is

also seeing an increase in young men arriving in the camp
(Note: UNHCR believes these unmarried, young men constitute
the majority of move-throughs who register and then attempt
to head to Italy. End Note).

FEW RESETTLEMENT OPTIONS

14. (C) Resettlement options are few and far between for residents of the Massawa camp, which may explain why so many are simply registering and moving on elsewhere. In 2008, UNHCR resettled only 130 refugees from Massawa, mostly to Canada and some to Australia. The numbers for 2009 are slightly better. So far, 114 have been resettled to Australia and 57 to Canada. The low resettlement numbers stem from the GSE's stringent visa policies when it comes to visiting the camp. Resident UNHCR officials are able to go to the camp somewhat frequently. Other visitors necessary to the resettlement process, such as from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), have a difficult time obtaining permission, she explained. Currently, 3,200 refugees have been interviewed and are ready for resettlement.

GSE RUNS THE SHOP

15. (C) Zipporah explained that the GSE's ORA has almost full authority over the refugee camp. ORA is responsible for meeting new arrivals at the border, registering them, distributing the food rations, maintaining the hospital and

ASMARA 00000280 002 OF 002

the schools, and the day to day operations of the camp. UNHCR believes ORA is doing a good job running the camp; however, Zipporah also stated that ORA is highly suspicious of any expatriates coming to visit the camp, including UNHCR itself. The UNHCR office has reduced its international staff from six to three over the past two years and has been pressured by the GSE to reduce it even further. Ideally, the GSE would like the operation to be completely run by Eritreans, Zipporah postulated, with UNHCR acting as only a funding vehicle.

16. (C) COMMENT: Relations between UNHCR and the GSE seem stable at the moment. However, the UN as a whole is subject to the GSE's fits of rage in response to UNSC statements and other political events. UNHCR is not exempted from this pattern and could quite easily fall under the GSE's ire. Also, given the GSE's "self-reliance" attitude, UNHCR could face the same tightening vice as ICRC (reftel).
MCMULLEN